Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Replacement Project

Do we need to maintain the viaduct's capacity?

Why was this study conducted?

During the Draft EIS public comment period, some asked why the viaduct's capacity has to be replaced. They suggested the viaduct could be removed and improvements to I-5, improvements to city streets north and south of downtown (the Center City Access Strategies), significant increases in transit, and other projects could replace the role of the Alaskan Way Viaduct.

The project initiated a study to determine whether a no replacement viaduct concept is feasible. The no replacement strategy evaluated in this study was:

- A four-lane surface street on Alaskan Way
- A single lane in each direction connecting surface Alaskan Way to the Battery Street Tunnel, with other lanes connecting to Elliott and Western Avenues
- Reasonable and achievable transit and transportation improvements to improve access into and out of downtown with emphasis on prioritizing movement of transit and freight, people and goods.
- Potential management and operational changes to I-5 to improve its ability to carry through trips.

What are the study's findings?

- The viaduct is an essential transportation corridor. It provides access to downtown and, along with I-5, is the primary corridor for trips through downtown.
- Even with the most optimistic assumptions about increasing transit, transportation management strategies, improvements to the downtown street system, and shifting traffic to other routes, the four-lane surface option would result in gridlock on I-5, and congestion for most of the day and into the evening on downtown streets and Alaskan Way.
- Four-lane and six-lane surface replacement concepts do not create a livable and pedestrian-friendly waterfront. Even though the viaduct is removed, Alaskan Way will become the busiest street downtown, carrying more traffic than Mercer Street.
- Coupled with the analysis in the Draft EIS, this is further evidence that the six-lane surface option is not feasible.

What are the traffic impacts of not replacing the viaduct?

Severe. Not replacing the viaduct will cause severe congestion for most of the day and into the evening.

- Traffic on surface Alaskan Way would quadruple along the central waterfront; 35,000 to 56,000 vehicles per day would drive on sections of Alaskan Way compared to about 10,000 today.
- Downtown street traffic would increase 30% to 50%, with the greatest increase in Pioneer Square and the waterfront. Congestion would increase to most of the day and into the evening.
- I-5 does not have room for trips from the viaduct corridor. I-5 is already congested through much of the day, into the evening, and will become even more so as the region continues to grow. The needed improvements to add capacity to I-5 will cost billions of dollars.
- Neighborhood-to-neighborhood connections greatly impacted. Neighborhoods west of I-5 (i.e., Ballard, Queen Anne, Magnolia, and West Seattle) will have to sit through congestion most of the day and into the evening.

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Can more transit replace the viaduct?

No. Even after the most aggressive strategies to increase transit ridership and prioritize transit access, the remaining trips will exceed the capacity of Alaskan Way, downtown streets, and I-5. This study looked at ways to maximize mobility for people by accommodating as much travel as possible on transit. Measures to prioritize transit moving to and through downtown streets by breaking through congestion points with transit lanes and priority systems were studied. Even with the monorail, light rail to Northgate, and up to 77% of commute trips to downtown on transit, growth in population, employment, and commercial activities will still result in increased traffic. The region faces the challenge that maximizing the use of transit is just one of many necessary steps to keep pace with regional growth.

In addition, removal of the viaduct could have detrimental impacts to efforts to provide efficient transit service to give people an option other than being stuck in traffic. Without the viaduct, traffic diverting to downtown streets would increase congestion, making it difficult to dedicate and reliably operate the lanes we need to keep transit service moving smoothly.

Can improvements to the downtown street network replace the viaduct?

No. Even after maximizing the efficiency of the existing downtown street network, there is not enough capacity for trips if the viaduct is not replaced. A full range of improvements were considered, including improving connections within the street grid, addressing existing bottlenecks, adding access ramps from the Spokane Street Viaduct, and giving transit priority. In fact, the benefits of these improvements could be negated by the impacts of closing the viaduct. The region will need to improve the downtown street network, expand and improve transit services, and implement effective travel demand measures simply to address existing problems and keep pace with growth.

Can I-5 replace the viaduct?

No. I-5 is at capacity today. Even with improvements costing billions of dollars, I-5 cannot handle both the projected regional growth and trips from the viaduct. Every reasonable and achievable improvement to I-5 was considered, including elimination of weaving issues, reconfiguring exit ramps to downtown, and improving access to and management of the express lanes.

Were freight priority measures considered?

Yes. There are few opportunities to give freight priority through downtown without the Alaskan Way Viaduct corridor due to the limited number of alternate routes. Other routes are either poorly suited for heavy truck traffic (downtown streets) or do not have available capacity (I-5) without the viaduct.

What will be done next?

This study confirms the fact that the viaduct cannot be replaced with a four-lane surface concept and other transportation improvements. FHWA, WSDOT, and the City of Seattle will select a preferred alternative this fall that replaces the viaduct's capacity.

To read the full *AWV No Replacement Concept* study, visit the project website at www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/viaduct.

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